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## SUN'S DAILY STORY

A MAID OF OLD DOMINION DAYS.

BY CURRAN R. GREENLEY.

(Copyright, 1902, by Daily Story Pub. Co.)

Over the young grass of the long avenue, the branching oaks flung slanting shadows. The sweetness of Bank-sia roses dwelt in the Virginia sunshine, where the trailing vines crept up the grey walls, and around the jewel-like panes of the mullioned windows, winding about the stately columns that guarded the portals of Gordon Hall. The peace of the country Sabbath had laid its hand upon the daily come and go; a quiet that brought every far off moving thing very near, in the rustle of a mighty silence.

Mistress Esther Gordon came slowly down the broad winding stairs. The light from the great oriel window above her head, shafting down into the gloom below, played a quivering halo of golden notes about the fair young head. In the dark setting of the old hall, the dainty figure shone out as some royal dame stepped down from a Romney picture, the blue brocade cut away from the firm white throat, where the pearls rose and fell amid the foam of lace, and the small feet clad in the high-heeled satin shoes.

"Four," boomed the clock that towers above her head, and as if in answer, the thud of galloping hoofs came to the avenue. Lansing had been true to his trust, although just across the river lay the army of Cornwallis, and the hail of the pickets could be heard in the clear evening air. There was scarce an instant's pause, ere the rider's spurred heel rang on the stone step, and Lansing strode down the length of the long hall. A goodly man, this young continental, albeit the buff and blue were a trifle tattered and faded, the blue eyes, were bright, and the stalwart form carried a lithe grace, that betrayed even more than the tinged cheek, the good red blood of Powhatan. The Romney picture awoke, and Mistress Esther, the sweet face all aglow, held out her two white hands.

"You foolish boy," but there is no chiding in the lovely eyes—and then his grave face brought the question to her lips. Before she could voice it the faint sound of a distant bugle rang across the river. Lansing sprang to his feet. "There they are! Hide me, Esther, for the love of the sweet saints, hide me! It is the King's troops."

Over Esther Gordon's face a whiteness went. Between lover and King lay the choice of a moment, but before that tribunal where a woman's verdict is fore-ordained. A moment later, and Mistress Esther's own little page was speeding the great red roan to a hiding place in the swamp, and Mistress Esther herself was fitting a key to the high carved clock that towered on the stair. To and fro, swung the great round disc of the pendulum, and the hands were pointing to ten minutes past four, when a laugh, and a clatter of accoutrements in the avenue warned them of the danger close at hand.

Mistress Esther closed the case, and hid the key among the laces about her white throat. One little foot was poised on the last step of the stair, as the Captain entered the door, his glitter of gold lace on the King's scarlet lighting up the gloom where the sun-rays failed to penetrate. He bowed low, as Mistress Esther advanced to meet him, and the ungloved hand, half-doubtfully held out to her, was white as a woman's, for Captain John Willoughby, of My Lord Cornwallis's favorite regiment, was versed far better in the lore of courts than in the tactics of these wild colonists, who fought as Indians from tree to tree rather than as well-trained troops, standing up to be killed.



No tremor of the white hand. In the open. There was an instant's embarrassment, as he halted and

stumbled through the unwelcome duty of announcing his errand.

"Mistress Esther, I am forced to commit the indignity of asking your permission to search the Hall. Believe me, the loyalty of your house is unquestioned by My Lord Cornwallis, as well as your humblest admirer," and here he bowed very low, "but we have tracked one of the rebels straight to this mansion, and to satisfy evil tongues it were well to search, though it be a mere matter of form."

Mistress Esther courted low. "Captain Willoughby, there need be no apology, no hesitation in this matter of your duty. A Gordon is ever a King's man, and it were well to set an example of moral as well as physical sacrifice in these times of disaffection, if so be it benefit the cause. My doors are open to your men, bid them search, search well, that Gordon's roof may hide no traitor to his Majesty." Up the stairs, and down other stairs, through the rambling garrets, and into holes where scarce a mouse could hide, leap into the cavernous cellars went King George's men, but never so much as a coat-tail of the hated blue and buff could the most diligent spy. Mistress Esther herself peered down the cellar stairs, and bade them to search well, lest the rebel should disturb her household in the midnight hour.

It was well done. No tremor of the soft white hands that poured the rare red wine for the Captain, and as the shadows grew soft and the gray time stole over the land, Mistress Esther paced by his side up and down the long hall, while he spoke of his home over sea, and the old mother that wrote such pitiful loving letters to her boy in this far-off savage land. He told her of the wide moors, where the purple heather bloomed, of the grim old castle that frowned across the smiling land, from the days of "Bluff Hal," and all the goodly heritage that but waited to claim her mistress. There was good cheer in the kitchens of Gordon Hall, where the servants feasted the troopers, and the Tory songs rang loud above the ale cups.

Would the end never come? Verily, she was becoming an arch traitor to self, to all maidenhood, as well as her



Lansing stepped forth from the case. king. And though the old clock kept its secret well, it could not shut out from the ears of the man hidden within the low musical voice telling the newest version of the very oldest story on earth. At last, when the voices had sunk to an indistinct murmur, and there had come a little silence to be translated as he would, jealousy got the better of prudence. He scorned to owe his life to her, this Tory Light-of-love that but held him there to torture the very heart from his bosom. So little a time, and the glorious head had lain on his breast and now the darkness hid what must be a repetition with her Tory lover. Oh! the jade. His hand was lifted to make known his presence, when again, the blare of the bugles sounded across the river. Instantly there was a stir in the hall below, while Lansing held his breath the mere force of habit rendering him quiet, although the passion of rage was shaking him from head to foot. There was a whispered farewell, and then the Captain's voice right beneath him, "The clock has stopped."

Mistress Esther went white to the roots of her hair, and all the blood rushed to her heart leaving her faint and sick, but the darkness hid her agitation, and the gay laugh rippled lightly as she replied: "Ah, Captain! You are a sad flatterer, I do protest. That was a very pretty compliment, but the clock is not to blame. It has given good notice that it no longer guards the hour. I am this day expecting the smith, but he has failed me, and

"were well, as that mischievous little page of mine needs meddle with the pendulum, and to keep it from his fingers I have locked it so well that I have lost the key. You will judge me a careless housewife in very truth, but there are many things in this vast house to burden the mind of one poor maid," and Mistress Esther sent a glance from under her long lashes that rendered the Captain more fain than ever to lift the burden of Gordon Hall from the shoulders of its fair owner.

His men had formed in the avenue, and there was no excuse for a longer delay, so the Captain backed gingerly down the steps, his sword a fingle, and the handsome head bared in the gloaming. With deliberate ease he mounted, and away down the avenue, turning in the saddle as long as the blue brocade trailed over the stones, and Mistress Esther took care to use no unseemly haste, but waited until the red was blended gray, and the last lilt of song had died away ere she mounted the stairs and turned the key. Lansing stepped forth from the case, his eyes blazing with pent-up wrath, but ere he could say the words that must have been fatal to that loyal loving heart, two white arms were flung about his neck, and the sweet face nestled against his shoulder.

"For you, for you I did it, and now may my God forgive me the lies that I have told this day, and the making a shuttle-cock of a good man's heart. I am traitor to all but you, traitor to myself, and my king, for the sake of the sweetest love that e'er a maid hath known. Thy country be my country, thy Washington my king, or what you will to make of him, so long as Guy Lansing's good right arm is mine."

With a prayer of thankfulness for the words left unsaid, he held her close, and there was silence where no word availed.

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